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SUBJECT: IRAQ: QATAR CAN SUPPORT EDUCATION, INFLUENCE SUNNI RELIGIOUS LEADERS

REF: STATE 181228

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¶1. (S) SUMMARY. In contrast to its support for our military in the region, Qatar has not been an important partner on political issues regarding Iraq. Post believes Qatar can provide increased support in areas where it can achieve leadership, such as education and training. Its contacts with Iraqi Sunni leaders could prove useful. Qatar remains concerned about and suspicious of the role of Iran in Iraq but would be unwilling to take a public position on the matter. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) QATARI VIEWS OF IRAQ. Qatar has not supported the new Iraqi government for four primary reasons. First, Qatar rarely faces major international issues head-on. Qatar recognizes that it does not have the diplomatic weight to work its way to the diplomatic forefront on this issue, and it likes to have a certain amount of control over its diplomatic initiatives. Qatar does not want to be a member of someone else's team. Second, Qatar has serious reservations over the Shia-dominated nature of the Iraqi government. Officials have expressed concerns about the perceived diminished role for Iraqi Sunnis. They feel that backing the Iraqi government now would be a form of abandonment of the Sunni Arabs. Third, Qataris are conscious of a need for balancing their support for U.S. military missions launched from Qatar. If they took steps to support Iraq politically, they would be open for criticism from conservatives. Finally, the GOQ has told us that lack of security is the primary reason for not opening a mission in Baghdad.

¶3. (S) ENCOURAGING QATARI SUPPORT. A Gulf-wide approach may not work with Qatar because it would require cooperation or coordination with Gulf neighbors. Qatar would need a role in which it can stand out. It has touted its support for higher education in Iraq, and it has trained groups of aviation and security officials. This theme could be broadened to support for training in a number of fields. Qatar could become the go-to country for education and training. We believe that engagement by high-level U.S. officials will be required for Qatar to expand its role.

¶4. (S) CONTRIBUTIONS. Following is a list of possible contributions Qatar could make to Iraq political and economic development. This list was produced (and later expanded upon) by Embassy Baghdad following a request in May 2006 from Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim to Ambassador Khalilzad.

Political

-- Foreign Minister could visit Baghdad to demonstrate support for the Iraqi government publicly (we would provide logistical support if asked);

-- Invite senior Iraqi officials - such as the Prime Minister, Iraqi FM and the MFA MinState - to Doha;

-- Establish a special Qatari envoy for Iraq and have him visit regularly - his role would be to look for ways to build bilateral cooperation until a Qatari ambassador can take up residence in Baghdad; or accredit Qatari Ambassador in neighboring country to Baghdad and instruct the Ambassador to visit regularly;

-- Press Syria and Iran to cease interference in Iraqi affairs. Specifically, urge Syria to stop support for insurgents and Saddam loyalists using Syria as safehaven for planning violent acts in Iraq. Urge Iran to stop flow of money, weapons, and training to militias;

-- Invite an Iraqi observer to GCC meeting to start building ties between Iraq and the Gulf states;

-- Invite Iraqi academics and government advisors to participate in events hosted in Qatar devoted to developing common understandings and approaches to regional security and economic challenges;

-- Recommend to us any figures from the Iraqi resistance not affiliated with the Al-Qa'ida network or Saddamists whom they think would be willing to talk to us;

-- Urge Iraqi insurgents with whom the Qatari government has

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contacts to stop fighting the legitimate, unity government and instead join the political process - these insurgents could open contacts with us and with the Iraqi government;

-- Urge Sunni Arab tribal and religious figures inside and outside Iraq to support the government and secure their pledge to work against those who insist on using violence; and

-- In particular, call upon Muthenna and Harith ad-Dhari to (a) moderate their public statements; (b) appoint a personal representative we know who speaks for Dhari. (If such discussions go well, we can consider a meeting between Ambassador Khalilzad and Harith ad-Dhari in Iraq or in Doha.)

Economic

-- Forgive the roughly \$4 billion in debt that Iraq owes Qatar;

-- Pursue with other states the idea of establishing a development bank to assist Iraq's reconstruction (an initiative within the GCC or the OIC perhaps); and

-- Sponsor scholarships for Iraqis to attend Qatari universities.

¶5. (S) SYRIA-IRAQ. Qatar has close ties with Syria and can meet with President Assad on a moment's notice. Investment ties to Syria also play a role in the relationship. We do not have specific information on Qatari views of Syria's relationship with Iraq, but Qatari security officials have commented that they believe Syrian efforts to control the flow of extremists to Iraq are genuine. Qatari policy toward Syria is anchored in Lebanese and Palestinian issues, rather than Iraq.

¶6. (S) IRAN-IRAQ. Qatar is alarmed by reports of Iranian influence in Iraq, as they are by the Shia-dominated nature of the government. Efforts to increase or restore Sunni influence will be welcome. In 2005 the GOQ attempted to arrange a meeting between the son of Harith al-Dhari, the

President of the Association of Muslim Scholars, and Embassy Baghdad in Doha. The Qataris claim that they brought Harith's son to Doha, but no U.S. representative showed up. Though Embassy Doha was aware of the offer and passed it to Baghdad, it was never told of Harith's son's visit. Whether or not it actually happened, the Qataris always raise the incident as an example of their unrequited willingness to help the U.S. in Iraq. Qatari officials have offered their connections with influential Iraqi Sunnis on other occasions. Efforts to get Qatar to join in a public effort to isolate Iran will be difficult because Qatar's economic future is tied in part to Iranian policy toward sharing the vast North Field/South Dome gas reserve.

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